

BILL # HB 2395

TITLE: welfare eligibility; immigration status; verification

SPONSOR: Pearce

STATUS: As Introduced

REQUESTED BY: House

PREPARED BY: Stefan Shepherd

FISCAL ANALYSIS

Description

The bill would require the Department of Economic Security (DES) to use the federal Systematic Alien Verification for Entitlements (SAVE) program to check the immigration status of persons applying for services in Title 46 of Arizona Revised Statutes. Programs in Title 46 include Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Cash Benefits, General Assistance (GA), Child Care, Child Support, Short-Term Crisis Services, and Adult Protective Services.

Estimated Impact

The JLBC Staff estimates that the bill could generate savings if it reduces DES participation by ineligible individuals. The bill would also generate increased administrative costs of approximately \$64,000 for TANF and GA applications. To cover these increased costs, use of the SAVE program would need to identify 18 TANF-ineligible recipients per year who would have otherwise received benefits.

DES has not provided JLBC Staff with an estimate of the bill's fiscal impact, nor have they provided estimates of the number of applications yearly for other programs in Title 46 of Arizona Revised Statutes such as child care, child support enforcement, or short-term crisis services.

Analysis

This legislation would require eligibility workers to use the federal SAVE program to cross-check applicants for DES benefits in Title 46 of Arizona Revised Statutes. The SAVE program is operated by the United States Department of Homeland Security, and contains information on all authorized immigrants and the government services for which these persons are eligible. In order to access the SAVE program database, states are required to pay a 24¢ fee for each initial query of the database, and a 48¢ fee if a follow up query is required for the same individual. Currently, DES uses the SAVE program to check the immigration status of applicants who report being born outside the United States; this legislation, however, would require use of the SAVE program for all applicants.

DES processed approximately 110,000 TANF and 29,000 GA applications in FY 2004 and expects to process about 119,000 TANF and 32,000 GA applications in FY 2005. Assuming similar figures in FY 2006, JLBC Staff estimates that about 151,000 persons will present themselves for enrollment in FY 2006. Eligibility workers currently access the SAVE program for approximately 5-7% of applicants, which would reduce the estimated number of new SAVE queries to about 142,000 in FY 2006. In addition, members currently on the program will undergo redeterminations in FY 2006. Because TANF eligibility is redetermined every 6 months, JLBC Staff estimates that all 119,000 TANF members will undergo the redetermination process on average once yearly. Because GA assistance is limited to 12 months out every 36-month period for most clients, JLBC Staff believes the number of these clients going through the redetermination process will be negligible.

Between the redetermination of current members and new applicants receiving initial eligibility screening, JLBC Staff estimates that eligibility workers would need to query the SAVE program approximately 260,000 times annually. Based on the per query fees discussed above, JLBC Staff estimates that this legislation would result in approximately \$64,000 in fees paid to the Department of Homeland Security.

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Analysis (Cont'd)

State eligibility workers currently attempt to verify applicants' citizenship and utilize the SAVE program for applicants that report being born outside the U.S. To cover the estimated administrative cost increase, the more extensive use of the SAVE program would need to identify ineligible persons who would have otherwise received TANF and GA benefits. At current costs of approximately \$3,600 per TANF case (\$273 per month for 13.3 months) and \$1,800 per GA case (\$153 per month for 12 months), this would equate to approximately 18 TANF, 35 GA applicants, or some combination of the two.

In addition to TANF Cash Benefits and General Assistance, there are several other programs in Title 46 of Arizona Revised Statutes. These programs include child care, child support enforcement, Short-Term Crisis Services, and Adult Protective Services. DES has not provided estimates of the number of applications yearly for these programs. For comparison purposes, there are currently approximately 23,000 child care cases and 270,000 child support cases, as opposed to roughly 50,000 TANF cases and 3,000 GA cases.

Local Government Impact

None

3/1/05